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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
8 August 1966PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
CONTAINED HEREIN IS **NOT** AUTHORIZED

ARMY review(s) completed.

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HIGHLIGHTS

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A detailed analysis of the situation in Quang Tri Province in the light of recently concluded Operation HASTINGS is provided in an annex.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

Operation PAUL REVERE II continues in Pleiku Province with 22 Americans killed in an engagement with Communist forces today (Para. 1). Two new search-and-destroy operations initiated by the US 25th Infantry Division in Hau Nghia Province (Para. 3). Operation BUCKS ends in Quang Nam Province with very light casualties reported (Para. 4).

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MACV's latest information on the strength of the 324th "B" Division and the number of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam is reported (Paras. 10-11).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: A spokesman of the United Buddhist Association releases another antigovernment and antielection statement (Paras. 1-2). Thich Tri Quang is allowed to briefly leave his place of confinement (Para. 3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: The loss of four US aircraft over North Vietnam is reported (Paras. 1-3).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

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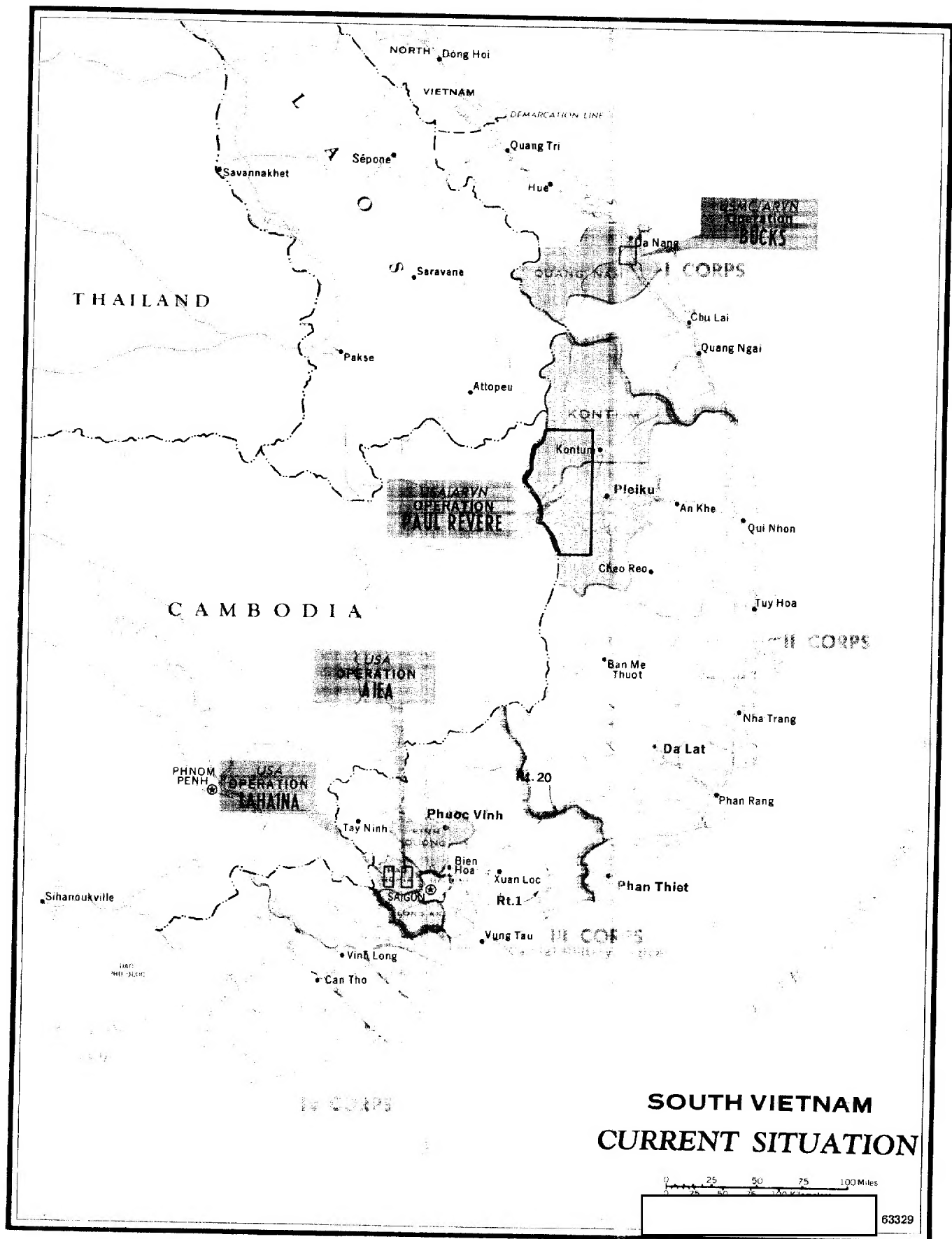
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• SPECIAL ANNEX: Survey of the Situation in Quang
• Tri Province.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. A US infantry company participating in Operation PAUL REVERE II established contact today with an estimated battalion-size enemy force in an area about 30 miles southwest of Pleiku. Tactical air strikes and artillery support were provided. Preliminary reports indicated that 22 Americans have been killed and 36 wounded. An estimated 65 Viet Cong were reported killed.

2. A US base-security operation near Phuoc Vinh in Binh Duong Province reported a 90-minute engagement with a Viet Cong force of undetermined size early today. According to preliminary reports, one American was killed and 16 wounded. Five Viet Cong were also reported killed.

New Operations Initiated

3. Two new search-and-destroy operations were initiated on 8 August by units of the 25th Infantry Division in Hau Nghia Province. One battalion began Operation LAHAINA in an area about 30 miles northwest of Saigon. Two other battalions began Operation AIEA in an area about 25 miles northwest of the capital. There have been no reports of significant contact with the Viet Cong by either operation.

4. Operation BUCKS, a joint US - South Vietnamese search-and-destroy operation conducted in Quang Nam Province, ended on 8 August. Friendly casualties were two killed and four wounded. There were no Viet Cong casualties reported, but 17 suspects were detained.

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Latest MACV Infiltration Figures

11. MACV has increased its estimate of the strength of each of the three regiments of the 324B Division from 1,500 to 2,500 men. In addition, on the basis of the interrogation

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[redacted] and the normal TO&E structure of an NVA division, MACV has accepted into the "possible" category of the order of battle seven support battalions of the 324th Division with a total strength of 1,800 men. These support battalions include antitank, mortar, antiaircraft, engineer, signal, transportation, and medical units. The total strength of the division is now carried at 9,410 men, instead of 5,000 as before.

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12. These, and other minor changes recently announced by MACV, raise the number of confirmed North Vietnamese soldiers in South Vietnam to 44,900. An additional 2,400 men are carried in the possible category, for a total PAVN force in South Vietnam of 47,300 men.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Unified Buddhist Association (UBA), principal opponent of the GVN, plans to conduct a nationwide election of delegates to convene a constitutional convention in September. Today the association repeated its call for a boycott of next month's election. Thich Thien Hoa, acting chairman of the UBA's Institute, issued a communiqué pointing out the Buddhist distrust of the present military regime and calling for a temporary civilian government immediately to supplant it and take charge of the elections.

2. Hoa's communiqué may represent a kind of last warning before more active opposition to the Ky government is initiated by the Buddhists. Some remnants of the "struggle" movement are still active in the Hue and Da Nang areas, and on the basis of the partial ultimatum that Hoa appears to be issuing, it may be possible to generate more trouble for the government in these areas as well as other parts of the country.

3. On Sunday, Thich Tri Quang was permitted to leave his place of confinement in Saigon to attend a meeting of the Buddhist Institute council. The GVN has apparently relaxed its posture toward Tri Quang since only last week it had prevented him from leaving the hospital grounds.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. US aircraft losses over North Vietnam continued at a high level for the second straight day as three F-105 Thunderchiefs and an F-4C Phantom were downed on 8 August.

2. Two of the F-105s were lost through unknown action in the vicinity of Yen Bai. The first aircraft went down while conducting an attack about 15 miles southeast of this important military complex. The second Thunderchief was lost while providing cover for his downed wingman. The parachutes of both pilots were sighted and rescue efforts are in progress. The third F-105 was reported to have been downed by ground fire 51 miles northwest of Dong Hoi. Radio contact has been established with the pilot and an SAR attempt is under way.

3. The F-4C was hit by ground fire approximately 40 miles north of Haiphong and was last reported flying east in an effort to eject over the Gulf of Tonkin. Rescue efforts have so far failed to turn up any trace of the crew. The air force has reported that the pilot of the RF-101 Voodoo lost on 7 August 30 miles west of Yen Bai has been recovered in fair condition.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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ANNEX

A Survey of the Situation
In Quang Tri Province

1. Current allied operations and intelligence reports indicate that there has been a large buildup of Communist forces in the Lao/Vietnamese border area north and south of Route 9, and in the area just north of the six-mile-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the two Vietnams.

2. In response to reconnaissance reports of a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) concentration just south of the DMZ, US Marine and South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces initiated Operation HASTINGS in northern Quang Tri Province on 7 July. Subsequently expanded to include seven US and five ARVN battalions, Operation HASTINGS established sporadic and often heavy contact with major elements of the PAVN 324B Infantry Division in this area during most of July and in early August. By 3 August, when the operation ended, the allies had killed 882 enemy soldiers (body count), captured 15, and seized 254 weapons. The allies lost 147 killed (126 US) and 488 wounded (448 US). Most of the fighting in Operation HASTINGS took place along the thickly forested ridges and ravines of the central part of the province, away from the flatlands on the coast where most of the population resides.

3. Defector, prisoner, and reconnaissance reports indicate that units of the 324B Division began their infiltration across the DMZ in May. This is the first known major NVA troop movement via this direct access route to South Vietnam. All three 2,500-man regiments (the 812th, 803rd, and 90th) plus a 110-man control headquarters infiltrated within a few weeks. This was the shortest period that a unit of this size has taken to enter South Vietnam. The presence of most of the division in Quang Tri Province was officially confirmed by COMUSMACV on 22 July.

Reasons For Use of the DMZ

4. There are several possible reasons why Hanoi decided to use the DMZ as a major infiltration route. First, it was quicker. A defector [redacted] stated that his unit's trip--over the coastal plains of North Vietnam and through foothills in the DMZ into Quang Tri's mountainous interior--took only 12 days; the trip through the Laotian corridor takes about 40. Second, it was safer. Until recently, the DMZ was not bombed, while the trail complex through Laos has been under constant air attack. Third, the shortness of the trip through the DMZ meant less attrition. The 324B Division had fewer men stricken with malaria at the end of its trip than units which have traveled through Laos. Finally, the use of the DMZ meant the North Vietnamese could utilize forward supply dumps north of the Zone.

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5. In this connection, exploitation of North Vietnamese documents captured during Operation HASTINGS reveals that all food for the 324th Division is being procured in North Vietnam. This tends to confirm US pilot reports of rice stores scattered along Route 102 just north of the DMZ and captive statements that their units were responsible for transporting rice across the Ben Hai River in the DMZ. The extensive supply facilities detected in this area suggest that Hanoi has made detailed plans to resupply Communist troops in the South via the DMZ and may have been using this shorter route for some time. In the past, Communist units operating in South Vietnam are believed to have relied almost exclusively on locally gathered food.

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Objectives of the Buildup

7. The short-term objectives of the North Vietnamese apparently were to secure the major communication routes reaching into Quang Tri's central and western mountains. There are two such routes: Route 9, which connects Laos with Route 1 on the South Vietnamese coast, and the Ba Long Valley, cleared a year ago by ARVN.

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[redacted] troops of the 324B Division were to capture the towns of Cam Lo and Dong Ha--both astride Route 9--and the town of Ba Long, just inside the entrance to the Ba Long Valley. Of the alleged objectives, Dong Ha appears to be the most ambitious; it is in the center of Quang Tri's thickly inhabited plains at the juncture of Routes 1 and 9.

8. Prisoner interrogations indicate that other Communist forces in Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces were to attack allied reinforcements. An unidentified division in Laos was scheduled to attack along Route 9 to ensure a free flow of food and weapons into South Vietnam from Laos. The 304th Division was reportedly in reserve in North Vietnam just above the DMZ.

9. Ultimately, the North Vietnamese apparently hope to "liberate" Quang Tri. The enemy may estimate that his chances for success in a large offensive are now better in I Corps than in any other area of South Vietnam. The two northern provinces of South Vietnam--Quang Tri and Thua Thien--were part of North Vietnam's Military Region IV during the French war. Therefore, this is "home" territory to many NVN units, and their knowledge of the terrain is considerable. In addition, as noted, the area is readily accessible to North Vietnamese supply dumps north of the DMZ. Nearby sanctuary in both Laos and North Vietnam may also be a factor of major importance in the Communist strategy. These military considerations, together with the fragile political situation in I Corps--so evident this spring--adds to the probability that the Communists hope to mount a major offensive in the northern I Corps area.

10. In spite of the heavy casualties sustained by elements of the 324B Division thus far in Operation HASTINGS, MACV believes that the division retains the capability of initiating multiregimental attacks and, if reinforced, of initiating a divisional-size thrust into central Quang Tri Province. An offensive could be supported on the south by two other PAVN regiments--the 6th and 95B.

The Government Situation in Quang Tri

11. Despite the recent battles and the nearness of the DRV, Quang Tri and its neighbor, Thua Thien Province, are far more secure than the other three I Corps provinces to the south. According to MACV figures of 31 May, the Viet Cong firmly controlled only 2.5 percent of Quang Tri's 270,000 people. The government reportedly controlled 46 percent, and most of the rest were contested. Since the bulk of the populace lives in the lowlands, it is outside the areas of normal Communist military strength in the province.

12. Evidently the Viet Cong have been experiencing difficulties in recruiting in Quang Tri and Thua Thien. Viet Cong guerrilla strength in the two provinces is reportedly low, and many members of theoretically southern Communist battalions in the area are in fact from North Vietnam.

13. General indifference to the Viet Cong cause in Quang Tri, however, is not accompanied by any strong feelings of loyalty toward the government.

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[redacted] remarked in mid-June that ideology plays a minor part in the local people's allegiance. Most are politically apathetic. Even the Buddhist "struggle" movement, which flared heavily in nearby Hue and Da Nang, failed to stir greatly the people of Quang Tri. There were demonstrations in Quang Tri city, but they lacked zest. Many of the participants coming in from the countryside were reported to have done so because they liked the bus ride.

14. Some causes of the civic indifference are apparent. The provincial administration, long beset by factional disputes, is inefficient even by South Vietnamese standards. The distribution of USAID commodities, such as cement, has been reported almost nonexistent to district villages outside of Quang Tri city. Pacification of disputed hamlets is going slowly, possibly because many members of the local pacification teams in the area joined simply in order to avoid the draft.

15. Despite the weakness of the government, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese may well have a hard time expanding their influence in Quang Tri by means other than massive introduction of NVA regulars. Refugees, although few in comparison with other provinces, are reported firmly against the Communists, and the collection of intelligence in the area has greatly improved over the last year. A report in March from a US adviser to the ARVN 1st Division (which operates in Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces) stated the opinion that the local population did not identify with Viet Cong main force battalions in the region, probably because the battalions were composed mostly of North Vietnamese draftees. Presumably the people would be even more prone to inform on units clearly labeled as northern, such as the 324B Division.

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